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THE EARLY RELIGION OF PALESTINE

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In two articles on "The Excavations in Palestine,"¹ the writer made an attempt to reconstruct the early history of Palestine in the light of these excavations. Especial attention was given to the part played by Babylonia and Egypt in the course of this history and the conclusion reached was, that, contrary to the prevailing opinion, the influence of Babylonia on Palestine was comparatively insignificant as against that of Egypt. An attempt was also made to show that whatever Babylonian influences did reach Palestine were probably brought there by the Hittite invasions of the country. It remains to be seen whether a study of the second phase of our subject, namely, the early religion of Palestine in the light of the excavations, will bear out these conclusions.

One of the first mysterious realities that inspired the awe of primitive man was the fact of death. Yesterday his companion fought at his side in the battle or took an active part in the chase; today he lies cold and motionless—dead. Why this change? Primitive man did not know; he noticed however that the breath, the soul, had left the body. But whither had it gone? The soul, though separated from the body, was near at hand, as he knew from his dreams in which the dead took as active a part as the living.² Primitive man had no Sheol or Elysian Fields, no hell and no heaven, to which he could conveniently consign his dead, that is, their souls, while their bodies were carefully laid away. His problem was not, therefore, concerning a future life or the immortality of the soul. He was concerned with the dead, *here* and *now*, and, since these were as truly members of the clan as were the living, on his treatment of them depended whether they would harm or help. And so arose the cult of the dead,

¹ *Biblical World*, January and February, 1910, 10 f., and 97 f.

² This of course indicated to him that the soul returned and reanimated the body.

ancestor-worship.³ The dead must be housed, fed, and cared for; and prayed to for assistance. Now the cave was one of man's first dwelling-places, and we must therefore expect to find it used as a house for the dead as well.



A DOLMEN NEAR WADY ZERKA

Although the dolmen represents a development out of the earlier burial-cave, it will be more convenient to discuss it first. The

³ Cf. Paton, *Biblical World*, February, 1910, 80 f., and Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, II, Pt. 2, 4 f., and 346 f. It does not fall within the scope of this article to discuss the many factors which enter into the development of ancestor-worship. It may be well, however, to call attention to a few general facts in this development. The idea of "soul" was much more complex in the thought of primitive man than with us. So, for instance, he associated the idea of soul with different parts of the body, such as the kidneys, liver, hair, nails, etc., more particularly with the blood, or even with the whole body. This we designate the corporeal soul (*Körperseele*). Then there was the idea of a spiritual soul, the breath-soul, the dream-soul, and others. In reality all of these different souls reduce themselves to the general idea of a power or powers which are either helpful or harmful. The problem of primitive man was to control these powers, that is, make all of them helpful. One way of disposing of the problem of the corporeal soul was by eating the body, soul and all. This is probably the explanation of cannibalism. Another was to destroy as much of the soul as possible by cremating the body. Or the body was carefully laid away in a cave or grave with

investigations of Dr. Schumacher⁴ have shown that the Palestinian dolmens were graves, just as were those found in other countries. The normal type of dolmen consists of four huge stones set upright, forming a rectangular inclosure (house), and covered with one or more large slabs. In some cases the floor is also covered with slabs, while the front end-stone is either only half as high as the others, or broken so as to form an entrance to the interior.⁵ Cup-marks⁶ are found on the cover slabs and on the floors of these dolmens. What is their significance? The most obvious answer, and the one probably most nearly correct, is that they were cut as receptacles for water for the dead.⁷ As already indicated, the dolmen was an artificial repvessels of food and drink which would satisfy the wants of the soul. If the belief developed that the spirit-soul was dissatisfied unless it could return to the body, it became necessary to preserve the body. For this purpose the process of embalming was resorted to. So Wundt.

⁴ *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins* (1886), 267 f.; (1893), 75 f.

⁵ See Gressmann, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1909), 113 f.; and Sophus Müller, *Nordische Altertumskunde*, I, 72 f. This opening is common to the dolmens of Sweden, England, France, the Crimea, the Caucasus, Palestine, and India, and in it Müller sees the link which connects all of them. He believes that the dolmen originated in the Orient where man took his first steps toward a higher civilization.

⁶ Cup-marks varying in size from a few centimeters to considerably over a meter in diameter, and from two to sixty and more centimeters in depth, and occurring singly or in larger or smaller groups, are found all over Palestine and Syria. Undoubtedly most of those found on the rock-surface near springs and cisterns were cut for and used as watering-troughs for flocks and herds; others were clearly the receiving vats of oil and wine presses, while many of those found in out-of-the-way places and on barren hill-tops may have been cut into the soft limestone by shepherd boys who found time hanging heavily on their hands. But after making liberal allowance for all such as could possibly have been made for "secular" purposes, there still remains a large number whose significance was undoubtedly religious. We may be sure that there was no period from the time of the first inhabitants to the present day that did not see new cup-marks cut into the rocks, but we have proof that many date from a remote antiquity. At Gezer, Tell el-Mutesellim, and the other Palestinian mounds, where the original rock-surface of the hill was laid bare, the excavations revealed them cut into this rock-surface, in many cases showing centuries of weathering, which proves that they were cut long before the Canaanites came into the country. Cf. Dalman, *Palästina-Jahrbuch* (1908), 23 f.; Macalister, *Explorations in Palestine*, 189 f.; Gressmann, *op. cit.* (1909), 113 f.

⁷ Müller, *op. cit.*, 170, holds that the cup-marks undoubtedly had a religious significance, but sees in them parallels to the symbols of fruitfulness and good luck, still objects of worship in India, rather than receptacles for the blood of sacrificial animals, as others regard them.

sensation of the caves used as dwellings both by the living and the dead. They are usually found in regions where natural caves are not common. So in Palestine most of the dolmens are found east of the Jordan, while there are comparatively few traces of them in the honey-combed hills of Ephraim and Judah.⁸

We have already discussed the neolithic burial-cave with its food-vessels for the dead, discovered at Gezer.⁹ It is extremely probable that it is typical of the burial-places of the primitive inhabitants of Palestine west of the Jordan. The Semites took over the burial-caves from their predecessors, in many cases, as at Gezer, using caves for cemeteries which the earlier inhabitants had used as dwellings. Out of the burial-cave developed the rock-hewn tomb, known in all periods of the later history of the country, Canaanite,¹⁰ Israelite, Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Crusader. The neighborhood of Jerusalem is especially rich in examples from all periods.

The custom of providing food and drink for the dead, as well as shelter, was not confined to the primitive inhabitants of Palestine. The Canaanites as well as the Israelites probably had the same custom, even before they entered the country, and it is therefore not surprising to find offerings for the dead in the Palestinian tombs of all periods from the earliest to the latest. In fact, this belief is by no means confined to primitive peoples; it was part of the religion of the highly cultured Egyptians,¹¹ Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans, and the same belief survives in Palestine today.¹² Beside the vessels for

⁸ Macalister, *Excavations in Palestine*, 192, attributes the absence of dolmens west of Jordan to the "iconoclastic and vandal races" who occupied this country during most of its history. Spoer's theory that the dolmen represents a primitive altar has little to be said in its favor (*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* [1908], 276 f.).

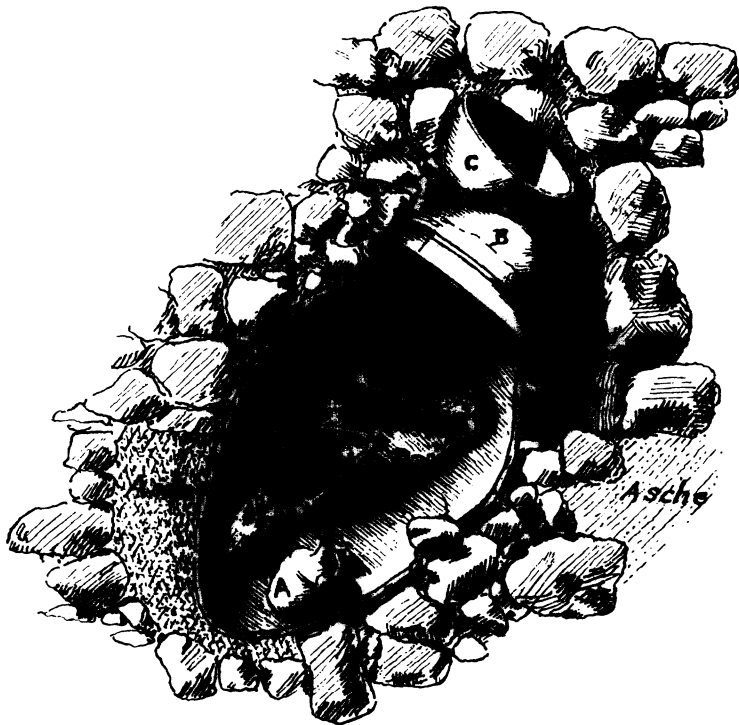
⁹ *Biblical World*, January, 1910, 23 f.

¹⁰ A large number of such tombs dating from all periods in the history of Megiddo are described in *Tell el-Mutesellim*, 165 f.

¹¹ As early as the Fourth Dynasty we find that "the king gives whole towns as mortuary endowment, to keep the tomb of the deceased [official] constantly supplied with offerings" (Breasted, *Ancient Records*, I, §§200 f.).

¹² On the stone slabs over the graves in the Moslem cemetery just outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem one occasionally sees a round cup-mark. The women who frequent the cemeteries on holidays usually bring along some food and place it upon the graves. My Arabic teacher, a Christian, told me that the food and water were for the dead, but that the Mohammedans do not like to admit this, and usually say that they are "for the birds."

food and drink, numerous other objects were deposited with the dead—weapons, scarabs, amulets, etc., undoubtedly intended to provide for the various needs of the departed. In the later tombs lamps are commonly found.¹³



From Schumacher's "Tell el-Mutesellim"

A CHILD'S GRAVE AT MEGIDDO

At Gezer a large number of infants were found placed in jars and buried near the high-place.¹⁴ Mr. Macalister and others saw in these sacrifices of the first-born. In some instances we probably have to do with such sacrifices, but it seems that the "iniquity of the Amorite"

¹³ Numerous explanations of this practice have been offered, but it seems to the writer that the lamps represent the last trace of a practice common among primitive peoples, of providing fires at which the dead might warm themselves. In most of the Danish dolmens the ashes from such fires are to be found (cf. Müller, *op. cit.*, 99 f.). Of course a later age would look upon the lamps as a means of providing light for the dead. The lamps from Christian tombs have such mottoes as "Christ is my light" upon them.

¹⁴ Macalister, *Bible Side-Lights*, 73 f.

has been very much exaggerated, for, just as the dead are frequently found buried beneath the streets, or under the houses,¹⁵ probably in order "to keep the spirit of the dead near its former abode, over which it could continue to exercise a benevolent influence,"¹⁶ so many, if not most of the burials of infants near sacred sites point to the belief in the rebirth of the soul.¹⁷ This point will come up again in the discussion of human sacrifices.

Nature round about primitive man was full of powers, malevolent and benevolent. For purposes of study we usually arrange these powers into two classes, demons or jinns, and gods, a classification, however, which never occurred to primitive man. He classified them into the powers which were near at hand and those which were far away. Those near at hand had to be respected. It is a well-known fact that the natives of Palestine today do not hesitate to take a false oath by Allah or Mohammed, both of whom are not near enough to be considered dangerous, but they would not think of speaking anything but the truth if called upon to swear to their statements by the scheich of some nearby *weli*. For our purposes it will be convenient to classify the deities of Palestine into those of the underworld, those of earth, and those of the sky or heaven. The different kinds of sacrifices correspond roughly to these three classes of deities.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Tell Ta'anneh*, 97, and elsewhere.

¹⁶ So S. A. Cook, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine*, 36.

¹⁷ "The jar-burials, where the infant is inserted head downwards, are more suggestive of the latter [rebirth of the soul, as over against the theory that burial in a contracted position represents the usual crouched posture of the individual as he sat in his life-time among his fellows], and the evidence from Africa and Asia shows that provision is sometimes made for the rebirth of still-born or very young babes on the conviction that at some future occasion they will enter again into a mother's womb. The numerous emblems of nature-worship and the mother-goddess, especially at Gezer, raise the presumption that the deities of the place were powers of fertility and generation; and, just as the shrines of saints today are visited by would-be mothers who hope for offspring, it is not improbable that in olden times those who had been prematurely cut off from the living were interred in sacred sites venerated by the women."—*Ibid.*, 37. This view was proposed by J. G. Frazer in *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, 77 f. The Algonquin Indians bury their dead children near frequented pathways so that their souls may enter into the children of prospective mothers who happen to pass that way (Wundt, *op. cit.*, II, pt. 2, 47).

¹⁸ This classification has nothing to do with any *theory* of sacrifice. For this the reader is referred to Wundt, *op. cit.*, 330 f. It has to do altogether with the *form* of sacrifice.

The most natural sacrifice to underground deities was the offering of blood and other liquids as libations; the natural sacrifice to the gods of earth was the offering of food, the deities being invited as guests; but the only way in which the gods of the sky could conveniently be reached was through the smoke of the burnt-offering. The most common offerings to the dead, considered as deities of the under-world—because they were housed in caves or buried—was the libation of water or blood. The deities of Canaan were predominantly baals of the land, and we therefore find the Canaanites eating, drinking, and making merry with their gods. On the other hand, the god of the Israelites, Yahweh, was a god of the wind, the storm, the thunder and lightnings.¹⁹ In view of his nature it was therefore easy to localize him in heaven, as was done in later Israel. But even in the days when the fitting sacrifices to Yahweh were a broken heart and a contrite spirit, he was pleased with the “sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offerings, with whole burnt-offerings” and bullocks upon his altar.²⁰

It will be well to keep this classification of deities in mind as we turn to the study of the places of worship and the cults connected with them. We may begin with the neolithic high-place at Gezer.

At about the middle point of the mound Mr. Macalister found a large rock-surface with some eighty cup-marks, and underneath this two large caves. On the surface of the rock there is a broad shallow channel which leads to a funnel-shaped hole in the roof of one of the caves. The channel was evidently made to carry the blood of the sacrificial animals to the deities who were supposed to inhabit these caves. It is worth noting that a heap of pig-bones was found underneath this hole in the roof. The pig was therefore a sacrificial animal among these people.²¹ A similar place of worship was found at Tell el-Mutesellim, Megiddo; but unfortunately the cave was enlarged and used by the later inhabitants as a dwelling, and still later as a cemetery. At another time a large part of the rock-surface was quarried away, but in what remains there are thirty-nine cup-marks of different sizes, many of which are connected by channels. The

¹⁹ In fact, as Gressmann has shown, these sterner attributes of Yahweh developed so far that he became the god of all the unfavorable phenomena of nature (*Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie*, 118 f.).

²⁰ Ps. 51:19.

²¹ *Bible Side-Lights*, 46 f.

original entrance to the cave was by a hole through the surface of the rock. We need feel no hesitation in regarding this rock-altar and cave underneath as the place of worship of the first inhabitants of the hill.²²

It is probable that in many cases the Semitic invaders took over the places of worship of their predecessors. At Gezer two caves were found, connected by a narrow, crooked passage, just east of the northern end of the row of pillars of the high-place. Mr. Macalister suggests that they may have been used in the giving of oracles.²³ At any rate it shows that the cave was associated with the high-place. Again at Taanach, Sellin found two caves, known as the caves of Ishtar-washur, from the cuneiform tablets bearing this man's name, found in an adjoining room. He was at first inclined to regard one of the caves as a cistern and the other as a place of refuge in case of siege, but later excavations made this unlikely. The channel, which he had thought conducted the water to the cistern, was found to lead to both caves, and to have started from two isolated rocks whose surface had been hewn flat, but which could not under any circumstances have collected enough water for a cistern. Here again the most probable explanation is that the channel was cut into the rock to conduct the blood of sacrificial animals to the deities who dwelt in the caves.²⁴ Sacred caves, the abode of chthonic deities, are common to all early religions; we find them in Greece; they are especially common in Phoenicia, while it is a well-known fact that most sacred places in Palestine still have their grottoes.²⁵ One thinks at once of the cave under the sacred rock of the Mosque of Omar at Jerusalem and the cave of Machpelah at Hebron.

Among the many natural objects with which the Canaanites associated deities were springs and trees. Both of these as sacred objects are still common in Palestine today. As W. R. Smith has pointed out, "the two chief places of pilgrimage of the northern Israelites in the time of Amos were Dan and Beersheba." At the former place is the sacred fountain, the source of the Jordan; at the latter, the "Seven wells."²⁶ The sacred tree was represented at the

²² *Mutesellim*, 154 f.

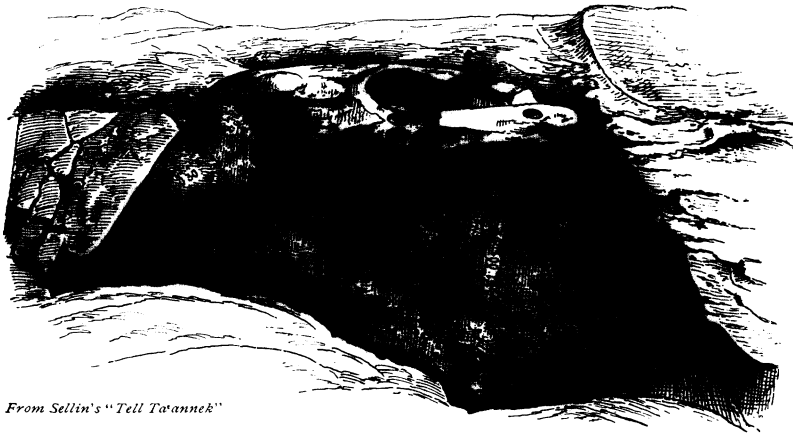
²⁴ *Eine Nachlese auf dem Tell Ta'annek*, 7 f., 32 f.

²³ *Op. cit.*, 67 f.

²⁵ W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, 197.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 181. Tree and pillar worship were part of the Minoan cultus in Crete. A sacred fig tree in a shrine was found represented on a stone vase from Knossos, and the oak "remained sacred down to classical times at Dodona in Thessaly."—Burrows, *Discoveries in Crete*, 134 f.

Canaanite high-place by the *asherah*, well known from the Old Testament references to it. Every city and village, every field, spring, tree—almost every natural object, had its baal, i.e., possessor, and every village and city had its high-place. Kittel²⁷ and Guthe have pointed out many such table-altars. So, for instance, at Nebi Samwil, probably Mizpeh, at Sar'a (Zorah), Marmita, etc.; in fact, a search of a few minutes near any village in Palestine is likely to be rewarded with the discovery of some traces of a high-place.



From Sellin's "Tell Ta'annek"

A CANAANITISH ROCK-ALTAR AT TAANACH

At Taanach a very fine example of a Canaanitish rock-altar was found. This altar was cut out of the natural rock, is exactly one meter in height, and has an oval cup, fifty by forty centimeters, cut into the surface. Beside this large cup there are three smaller ones, eight to nine centimeters in diameter. On the east side there is a step forty-five centimeters high. Evidently the altar was intended for offerings of food and drink—not for burnt-offerings. It will be seen that such an altar violates Israelitish law in two respects: in the first place, it was hewn out of the rock, in violation of Exod. 20:25; in the second place, it had a step, the height of which makes the prohibition of Exod. 20:26 very clear. Another such altar was found on the west side of the hill at Taanach.²⁸

²⁷ *Studien zur hebräischen Archäologie*, 97 f.

²⁸ *Tell Ta'annek*, 10 f.

Why was the Israelitish law directed against altars of hewn stone? The answer lies in the difference between the Canaanitish and early Israelitish altars. The latter, like the common Beduin altar, was a stone²⁹ or heap of stones, set up at random, wherever the deity appeared, and it became not only the table-altar, but also the abode and symbol of the deity himself. Naturally it would be dangerous to lift up any tool upon it, for in the process the deity would be "polluted," as Exod. 20:25 has it. On the other hand, the Canaanitish table-altar was not regarded as the abode of the deity. This was the sacred pillar, *massebah*, set up near the altar. The Canaanitish table-altar was taken over by the Israelites, but as an altar for burnt-offerings. Kittel³⁰ calls attention to an interesting Old Testament passage which illustrates this. In Judg. 6:11 f. we have the story of how the angel of Yahweh appeared to Gideon near an oak in Ophrah while he was threshing wheat nearby. The angel promised deliverance to Israel at the hand of Gideon. Gideon, however, asks for a sign. "And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of meal; the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it." Evidently this prepared food was to be spread out upon a rock and the deity was to join in the feast. But the sign, the proof that Gideon was speaking with an angel of Yahweh, lay in the fact that after the food had been spread out upon the rock, "the angel of Yahweh put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there went up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes." The experience of Manoah was a similar one.³¹

²⁹ The blood as the "life" is looked upon as belonging to the deity, and we therefore find the Semites slaughtering their animals which are to be used as food upon stones or altars, down which the blood of the slaughtered animal is allowed to run. To eat the meat of an animal slaughtered upon the ground was looked upon as eating it with the blood. Cf. I Sam. 14:31 f.

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, 104 f.

³¹ Judg. 13:9 f. A study of the high-places and altars at Petra makes it probable that the Nabataeans did not have the altar for burnt-offerings (Dalman, *Petra und seine Felsheiligtümer*, 56). The famous "incense-altar" found at Taanach (*Tell Ta'annek*, 109 f.), which seems to have been a heating stove and no altar at all, belongs to the period ca. 1000-700 B.C. Consequently it does not fall within the scope of these articles. The question arises whether the Egyptian incense-altar, found in the Israeli-

The high-place was nothing more than the table to which the deity was invited in order to partake of a sacrificial meal along with the worshippers. Such a gathering is described in I Sam., chap. 9. It shows of course that the Israelites took over the worship at the high-places from the Canaanites. It is not necessary to cite instances of this—a practice which was regarded as whoredom by the prophets, and as back-sliding by the later writers. But how was the god represented? As already indicated, by the *massebah* or sacred pillar. “Of course not the rudest savage believes that in setting up a sacred stone he is making a new god; what he does believe is that the god comes into this stone, dwells in it, or animates it, so that for practical purposes the stone is thenceforth an embodiment of the god and may be spoken of and dealt with as if he were the god himself.”³²

The high-place at Gezer contains perhaps the most interesting group of pillars which the excavations have revealed. Originally they were ten in number. Eight of them are still whole, and the stumps of the other two are still in position. They are unhewn monoliths, set on end and supported at the base by smaller stones. The line runs due north and south. They vary in size from five and a half feet to over ten feet in height. Four of them have cup-marks, and one of them, the smallest, has polished spots on the surface, which point to the practice of anointing and kissing the sacred object. All but one of the blocks seem to have come from the imme-

tish stratum at Megiddo (*Mutesellim*, 127), is not also to be looked upon as a brazier rather than an altar. It is hardly possible that the Canaanites of Palestine did not worship the Syrian god Hadad, who is in many ways similar to the god of the Israelites. If they did, we should expect burnt-offerings as part of his worship. And yet it is impossible to designate anything in the excavations which undoubtedly points to such offerings. Nor have the excavations furnished any indication concerning the nature of the worship of such Canaanitish gods as Reshep, Šaphon, Gad, Milk, Šedeḫ, etc., known chiefly from their occurrence in proper names in the Old Testament or the Amarna letters. Most of them were probably local baals.

³² W. R. Smith, *op. cit.*, 206. In the end the pillar becomes the anthropomorphic image of the deity. In Semitic religions the plain pillar remained the only representation of the deity almost without exception. The symbol of Dushara, the chief deity of the Nabataeans, was the pillar, even in the age when Roman ideas must have been dominant at Petra. Spoer's revival of the theory that the *massebahs* were phalli (*op. cit.*, 285 f.) has been successfully refuted by Gressmann (*op. cit.*, 116 f.). It is interesting to notice that the arguments used by these men had already been discussed at length by W. R. Smith (*op. cit.*, 456 f.), a fact apparently overlooked by both.



THE HIGH-PLACE AT GEZER

Three of the eight standing pillars are here shown

diat neighborhood of Gezer, and this one seems to have come from Jerusalem or its vicinity. Perhaps it was brought to Gezer after a successful raid by the Gezerites against their enemies in the hills.

At Tell es-Safi, Gath, a high-place with three pillars, running east and west, was found. At Taanach the excavations produced pillars of various kinds. The oldest of these are two pillars, the one with a cup-mark on the top, the other with one on the side. It has been supposed that these stones represent a male and a female deity. The potsherds found scattered about, show that the pillars were set up by the Canaanites, but that they were also used later by the Israelites. Under the north tower of the third stratum, a double row of columns, five in the row, was found. These were erected in the classical Israelitish age, 1000-800 B.C. Sellin sees in the number ten a possible religious significance. These pillars had no cup-marks, but they probably belonged to a high-place. Beside these, Sellin found single monoliths before the entrances of houses. Since none of the houses with such monoliths in front of them had doorposts, we may see in them a substitute for these. The custom of smearing blood upon the doorposts of the houses, known from Exod. 12:7, comes to mind. These monoliths come from the Israelitish period.³³ At Megiddo two rooms with massebahs were found, one belonging to the fifth, the other to the sixth stratum.³⁴

In a later issue will follow a discussion of the different kinds of human sacrifice practiced in Canaan; of the idols, charms, amulets, etc., found in the excavated mounds, and their value in reconstructing the unofficial, everyday religion of the common people of the country; and finally, of the Egyptian and Babylonian influences which entered into the early religion of Palestine.

³³ *Tell Tasannek*, 103 f.

³⁴ *Mutesellim*, 105 f., 125 f. Gressmann, *op. cit.*, 116 f., has brought together the references to pillars, massebahs, not connected with high-places, found in the Old Testament: (a) Memorial stones, to commemorate some event in the life of an individual, or in the history of the nation. Examples are the stones set up by the Israelites when they had crossed the Jordan (Josh., chap. 4) and the pillar set up and anointed by Jacob at Bethel; (b) Stones set up to commemorate a victory over the enemy, such as that set up by Samuel and called Eben-ezer, "stone of help" (I Sam. 7:12); (c) Grave-stones, as the massebah by the grave of Rachel between Bethel and Rama (Gen. 35:14); (d) Boundary stones, such as those set up by the treaty between Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:44 f.); (e) Stones set up in pairs at the entrance to a temple, city or house (I Kings 7:21; II Kings 12:10; 23:8).